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## ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS

### A sustainable alternative for mass tourism in Fiji Islands

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#### SUMMARY

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and one of the main foreign earning earners for Island in the Pacific. Tourism development is aiming at attracting more and more tourists to their respective islands. However, mass tourism brings its own repercussions. Mass tourism is rapidly increased in the South Pacific Islands and this is obvious in Fiji tourism. Since the official inception in 60's, it has been on the increasing trend. Mass tourism generates employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, contribute to Islands' GDP, and the multiplier effects on other sectors of the community. However, this bulk of tourists concentrating at certain locations have been proved to have adversely affected the environmental of the area.

Specifically, mass tourism in Fiji is concentrated on the Coral Coast of Sigatoka. Nevertheless, there are environmental problems associated with the mass tourism such as massive hotel development, and numerous tourism activities at the Coast. These problems include clearance of mangroves and forests for hotel construction and land reclamation, golf courses and other luxurious tourism products. Mangroves at the Coral Coast are disappearing at faster rate than other coast with less hotel development. This is a threat not only to the hotel operators but to the local people surrounded the area. Creation of artificial coastal 'buffer zone' such as walls, do not absorb wave energy, thus lead onto degrading of beaches. Coral reefs are placed under threat from different tourism activities including inadequate sewage disposal. Algae has affected clean ocean for both tourists and local people. Local people depend on the sea for their livelihoods. Freshwater shortage management is one major problem in densely populated area. Crime rate is increasing at Korotoga, an area where chains of international hotels are located. And beside these environmental and social problems, the problem "leakage" in South Pacific Island tourism is considerably high because of foreign domination on in the tourism industry. Fiji for example, "two thirds" of the tourist expenditure is leaving the country in payment of imports, repatriate of profits and payment of foreign expertise salaries as tourism operators.

Ecotourism on the other hand, with its underlying principles of development, has provided alternative strategies for mass tourism. Although there has not been any worldwide consensus on definition, "ecotourism" can be a "nature-based" tourism and/or

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